

The Reclaimer, Part 1

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Category: Halo
Genre: Sci-Fi
Language: English
Status: In-Progress
Published: 2005-12-17 02:23:03
Updated: 2005-12-17 02:23:03
Packaged: 2016-04-27 01:12:03
Rating: T
Chapters: 1
Words: 4,401
Publisher: www.fanfiction.net
Summary: Please read and review, my first fiction.

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7:05 AM: BEEP, BEEP I hit the snooze button, got up and slowly shuffled across the room to the door, 7:05 still burned red in front of my eyes. My coffee was made, same as every morning, no cream, no sugar. The taste of ash filled my mouth as I sipped. Reading the headline "Spartan II Project a Success." below it was the Photograph of a man in a large suit of armor standing next to a woman in white being given a purple heart. "touching" I said. I sipped again, the same bitterness of before as the fluid burned my mouth. The picture was captioned 'Captain Miranda Keys and Spartan 117 accepting awards'. I smiled _"didn't even get a color photo," I_ thought. Tired of this crap, I got up and left for work.

I stepped out of my apartment and locked the door. I swung my key chain around on my finger, it made a chinking sound as I flipped it up into the air and caught it. I pushed the elevator button. Three minutes went by. Annoyed and in hurry, I jammed it five times in quick succession. Nothing happened and the elevator button continued to glow as if solely to mock me. I stepped up and looked at the bar at the top. '7:15' it flashed. Then a scroll of text went by 'elevator closed for repairs, we are sorry for the inconvenience.' I took the stairs.

I walked across the street to the parking lot "hey Al" I said, a black man in a blue coat with an orange stripe on the sleeve Depicting a badge looked up. "hey man" he said "nice weather today" I replied. "Ya if you say so" he said the pale wisps of mist that was his breath visibly blowing in the wind. "a bit too cold for me" he said. I shrugged. "I'll need to see some ID before you can pass" the toothpick between his teeth darted about as he spoke. I opened my wallet and gave him the card. "well, looks like you" he smiled as he

spoke. "But I don't know€| I'll let you in as a favor though" he laughed, we both knew no ID was required to enter the parking lot. "Have a nice day," I said as I stepped into the lot. He began to read a newspaper. It had the same scene on the front but in color this time.

I approached my car, ugly, dented, scratched, blue "keyed again?" I said sighing. I realized that I wasn't the most popular person in the world, but this was getting a bit out of hand. I bent over to examine the tires, it seemed that someone had at least attempted to pop them, due to the various scratches on the hubcaps. Luckily I had opted for the nano-fiber. After dwelling on this for about half a minute, I opened the door and stepped in. It was at least five degrees colder inside. I shivered as I fidgeted with the key, finally forcing my numb hand against the keyhole. Simultaneously the door closed, the seatbelt pulled itself uncomfortably across my neck, the lights turned on and a little voice chimed "good morning Mr." a pause "smith?" sounding alien and almost questioning. "Voice recognition" halting mid-sentence "I am David Smith" I said dully. A faint whirring sound followed "accepted". I was grinding my teeth at this point "password" thoroughly annoyed, I kicked the dashboard "acce-pt'd", "fantastic" I said as I thought of the already high repair bill. It came to life with the same dull, whirring sound of all cars made during the fuel ban of 2546. Then the vacuums roared to life inhaling large quantities of carbon dioxide. I opened up a small slot under the radio and pulled out the magnesium rod. "Almost gone" I thought aloud as I opened the glove compartment and pulled out a fresh one. I slid the new one back into the slot and closed the lid. The rest of the trip would be plagued as the same loud, buzzing sound that always accompanied the commute.

When I arrived I hoped the cold would deter at least some of the protesters. There were more now than yesterday. They were marching around, shouting things like "nature is the way!" or "Down with the Nazis". As I walked around to the back entrance I was referred as "Fascist", "Nazi" and "Murderer". "why haven't they made a law against that yet" I asked one of the tired looking security guards as the picketers wrote various comments on the windows. I walked by a young scientist who stuck out as new like a soar thumb. The most likely reason for this was because he'd clearly been doused in red paint by an angry protester. I looked out to the parking lot, all but one of the vehicles was armored and armed to the teeth with security devices. I chuckled at the new guy's expression as his car was vandalized. Seeing him wince as the windows of his brand new car were smashed in. The riot squad had stopped coming years ago.

I entered the lab and was greeted as "janitor" by a short, fat, balding man wearing a shirt with "Zombie Food" Written across it and brown suit pants. "hey" I said, janitor was a pleasant description of my job to say the least., executioner would be closer. Robert, who had arrived some time last year, had suggested we all get code names, no one seemed to really care that much so they stuck. I walked pass a couple of men prodding what looked like a cross between a sloth and a lobster and a women examining a hologram of DNA entitled 'Soylent Green'. Not quite caring I made my way up to the test chamber where they were now taking bets on whether Jack's Giant Squid and Grizzly Bear combo would beat the last game's champion whom was affectionately dubbed "Mass of semi-sentient green sludge" which was basically a miniature bog with the will to live. Aside from breathing problems, the Squid-Bear was quite formidable, but was eventually

absorbed. The holograms fizzled and died, of course— real animals cost money. "Good fight" I commented. Although beaten, Jack had been proud of his monstrosity. "Better n' last weeks" he commented "I'll try spikes next" he thought aloud.

I walked down to a room filled with lime-green glowing tubes who's contents were composed of various humanoid experiments. I walked across this to the armory. I was given a battle rifle and a stun gun, I took the elevator to test chamber beta where I was to "supervise" the experiments. Basically, it was my job to take care of any escapees and to protect the scientists. As I stepped from the observation booth into the actual chamber, I saw a strange looking creature that seemed vaguely familiar, I coughed, "_An elite? Here!"_ I thought frantically. I entered. The room was dully lit by a blinding, uncovered light bulb aimed in the creature's face; it looked more like a movie interrogation than anything. The scientists asked it questions and were answered by insults ranging from "demon worshipping filth" to "Pagans!" Even I was told several times how ugly I was— Suffice to say, we didn't get much out of him and torture would have been quite controversial, causing all kinds of arguments. The practical purpose for keeping him alive however was his DNA. I frowned at it as the scientists conversed about different purposes for it. One suggested cloning, while the other made the point of saying that the covenant's strength was its technology, elites are little use without their weapons and shields. "What we need, is one of these prophets he keeps prattling on about" one commented to the others nods. "We should clone them, for test subjects for disease" I said while the scientists considered this—

The intercom chimed three times and a voice crackled into existence "employees, report to conference room". Wondering what was going on we crowded into the elevators and began our ascent. We arrived at a small room with a crescent table surrounded with chairs along the outside, the chairs in question were almost full of coworkers with grim expressions who turned to us briefly as we entered. We sat down but no one talked. A man, clearly military due to his uniform, was standing in the front of a projector screen. He spoke "This morning at 0700 hours, a Covenant fleet arrived at Earth" there were frantic whisperings among the crowd "The general public, is not yet aware of the situation as we do not wish to cause wide-spread panic among the colonies." I thought of the already high tension between the public and the military as he continued "As you may or may not know, a classified Spartan training facility has been under construction on earth for the past four months. These soldiers are instrumental to our success in the campaign against the covenant. This building will be converted to a Spartan training and creation facility as well as for weapons research and development" More whispers among the crowd "We are short on willing participants for the process, we currently only have twelve living trainees who will arrive shortly. If you wish to sign up, forms are at the security clearance stations, that is all"

I went to church after work, something I hadn't done in a long time. I sat in the pews and I prayed, I prayed my heart out, I prayed for my friends and family on earth, I prayed for my dead sister, I prayed for people I barely knew, people I hated, I even prayed for the protesters. I crowded into the confession booth and said everything. The Covenant had put the fear of God in me— I looked up from the sound of the church's double doors slamming, I looked over, it was the doctor from this morning. He hung up his red stained coat at the

door and walked over. I got up, which startled him, he didn't seem expect to see anyone here. The doctor had pale skin, glasses, short brown hair and gray eyes. "Oh, umâ€¦ hello" he said, regaining his composure "I'm Dr. Frank Belmont", "David Smith" I replied. We shook hands, "So the Covenant finally found earth huh?" I said, "Ya" he said mournfully. "Soâ€¦ you got family there orâ€¦?" "No" he replied, "I was actually working on the Spartan project at earth", "really?" I said genially interested, "oh yes" he said. "You work on the Spartan two project?" I asked, "No, that was years before my time" he said. I spoke "So you're here toâ€¦", "perform the augmentation procedures" he replied, I smiled "Reallyâ€¦ 'cause I know a girl in genetics testing who could really use some, althoughâ€¦ maybe not the kind you're qualified for" which caused him to chuckle.

I dreamt, it was the crusades, I was in Jerusalem and the Christians were approaching, but there was no one to man the defenses. I screamed to the people to help me, but they were too busy smashing my car and ranting about unholy genetic experiments. I looked to the soldier from the meeting who simply shook his head at me. He then erupted into flame as the elite from the interrogation stepped out from within him, wielding the light bulb as one would a sword. It grew larger as it approached, wings sprouted from it's back and it's eyes were of fire. I prayed, and as I prayed I was encased in holy armor and a heavy cross was placed upon my shoulders. I struggled and fell with this new burden as the creature laughed at me. I pulled with all my might and threw it at the creature who shattered like glass and was replaced with a large, blue, glowing eye with by a bright glowing halo. It spoke "you are to be the reclaimer, to serve and die for the glory and good of all." I was transported into blackness with only this thing to accompany me, it suddenly shook and turned sideways forming into a giant, white planet and the ring above its head had masses of land within it. I was drawn towards the ring and to my terror, it was covered by blackness which spread to the other worlds. I suddenly found myself being suffocated by a great creature, the Gravemind was choking me, it was the most terrible thing I'd witnessed. I prayed and the ring shone brilliantly and a blast tore through it and swept the galaxy clean of these terrible creatures.

I awoke with a bright flash, this time the numbers burned into my vision were coordinates. I stumbled and wrote them down on a small notebook, I knew what I had to do. I got to work around four, the crowd wasn't even there except for the sparse tents of those dedicated enough to stay overnight. I stepped right through the front door and greeted a bewildered looking security guard, "People have been showing up really early today" he said "is that so?" I replied slightly amused. I saw Jack, a tough looking security guy, and the 'soylent green' girl all signing up. I walked over, pulled out a form and greeted them. The big guy was tanned, bald and spoke only in short, blunt sentences, his name was Donald and he was about 6'4. The girl was named Stephanie Nambrik and she was pretty nice, she had blonde hair, green eyes, a pretty face and stood about 5'2. And of course Jack had short, brown hair, brown eyes and had an Irish accent standing about 5'6.

I sat in the waiting room with Jack, Stephanie, Donald and a few others. It was a plain room with beige wallpaper and a fish tank. It seemed more like we were waiting to see the dentist as opposed to being interviewed. "David Smith? The doctor will see you now" said a short, brunet woman holding a clipboard. I walked in to see a balding

man with a moustache and a perpetually furrowed brow. "Nowâ€¦ you wish to become a Spartanâ€¦ is that correct?" he said, looking over my file. "Yes sir" I replied. "It seems that you have experience with weapons and a major in biological and mechanical engineeringâ€¦" he said donning a set of glasses, "that is correct" I responded. Apparently not choosing to delve into why I had not become a scientist which I was more than qualified to be, he continued "Wellâ€¦ you have qualifications and experience that surpass what we had expected from recruitsâ€¦ Mr. Smith, your hired" He said with a slight grin.

I lay on a stretcher along with Stephanie, Donald and Jack in one of the test chambers. One of the doctors placed a mask on me; the last thing I remembered was the fluorescent light flickering.

I awoke. My body was numb. I looked around to see where I was, suddenly it was as if someone had turned a green light on, but there were no sudden shadows. Startled I blinked and it was dark again, "_success_" I thought. I turned on the lamp; I was in a small room consisting of a bed and a desk with a laptop computer. "_I wonder how the others are doingâ€¦_" I thought, suddenly a tutorial style screen popped up in my field of vision. It gave me the basic instructions on how to access data vaults and communicate 'telepathically' through the new hardware installed into my brain. I accessed the vault, shocked to find that of all the subjects, only Stephanie and I had survived. I sighed at the loss of my friend Jack and the select few brave enough to join. The doctors had told us that few, if any, of us were expected to survive. I lay down on the bed and looked upâ€¦ staring at the bunk above meâ€¦ "_Wait! There's a bunk above me?"_ I rolled out of bed, looked up, and sure enough, there she was. I smiled and went back to bed.

I awoke with Stephanie staring at me. "Ah!" I yelled and dove backward drawing a pistol on her. She laughed, then looked at the gun puzzled, "where did you get that?" I honestly hadn't known where I had got it. She got up from the desk, reached under her own pillow and pulled out an identical one. She turned to me "how did you grab that so fast?" We heard a noise, she rolled under the bed and I dived for the door, standing behind it as it opened, I pointed my gun at a startled nurse who nearly dropped her food tray. I pulled the gun away and laughed as Stephanie climbed out from under the bed. I turned to her remembering who she was "just like old times eh?" she looked puzzled and suddenly smiled then looked astonished "David? David Smith?" she asked, unbelieving. "Yep" I said as Stephanie ran over and hugged me. "Where have you been all these years? I don't think I've seen you since high-school graduation." Startled by the hug, I smiled when she released me. I turned and saw the tray on the ground as the nurse ran off and we burst out laughing.

It was raining that day. Training had begun, but we were in for a treat the previous Spartans had never even thought possible, we were to train against real elites. We were taken onto the battlefield armed with SMGs, this simulation had been affectionately dubbed "Blood Gulch". The hologram projectors caused the surrounding walls and observation deck to become mountainsides and the sky. I climbed onto the roof of our base and observed the other side. Several dozen large canisters raised out from the dirt and released a semi conscious elites. Clones of the one I had interrogated not so long ago, they had a summarized version of that elite's life uploaded into their brains, and would be fully aware within a few minutes. They

picked up what they believed to be their weapons, which, although realistic, simply shot out holograms that our (and their) suits would react to. We didn't have the armor and were simply clad in our regular uniforms, but we had special equipment that would also react.

The briefing screen appeared in front of us. "Greetings" a voice said "We've decided to change things within the program, instead of Spartans trained together and being sent lone into battle. We will have 'Brood Bothers', which will rely more on team work and brains than brute force, although you are still improvements above previous Spartans, you will be equipped with normal military weaponry and suits. We've also added a customization option for those of you who want to take above the mandatory training. In this mission you must rely on your 'brood brother' or sister and beat overwhelming odds". "This should be interesting" Stephanie said "Indeed it should" I replied.

It seems the elites were being briefed by a 'prophet' and told to defend the base. I knew this because I could hear it. I activated my active camouflage and scouted ahead. The elites seemed to have been armed quite well. With a base of nearly one hundred of them it would be tough. I came back to our base "it seems they've been ordered not to move, so we shouldn't worry about them attacking us. How much food have we got?" "Enough for a maybe a day or so" she said. "How about ammunition?" I asked, "Apparently, whatever's loaded in the gun" she said sighing "really planed for the worst case scenario" "yaâ€|" I replied. "Can their weapons be used against them?" I asked, "wellâ€|" the commander told me they could be used to lower the shields, but not do any real harm to them, and we have a hit meter attached to our suits, we get five hits before we loose once our shields are down."

After lunch, we decided to chart up a plan. I would sneak up to the base and cause a commotion, maybe drop a grenade or something, I might be able to take a couple of them out in the process. She then would come in from the mountains at the right and start shooting close to the base, then I could sneak through and attack from behind, and if that failed, we could retreat to the trench I dug and think up another one. I turned on my active camouflage and snuck along, silently. I slung my MSG over my back, preferring to use my hands as opposed to such a clumsy weapon. I climbed up the side of the base and placed a timed explosive by a group of elites conversing. I slid back down and ran around inside the base and was inside when I heard the explosion. I dived to the side as an elite tried to run through me. I walked through the base, but they had left patrols. I leapt onto the ceiling and clung to it, much more graceful than even the most skilled elite. I slowly climbed across the ceiling until I reached the center. There was an elite looking around. I dropped down and silently dispatched him via broken neck. I then took his weapon; an elite saw him and walked over, prodding him with his foot. He then bent over to check his pulse, at this moment the plasma rifle came crashing down upon his skull. "Five kills and they don't suspect a thing," I thought. I ran up the wall and jumped, grabbing the roof awkwardly. I pulled myself onto it, seeing the elites inspecting the remains of the explosion, I almost laughed from their expression as I threw a plasma grenade onto one of their heads. BAM! "thirteen kills" I thought. Judging by their bio-scans the elites were now afraid. I signaled for Stephanie to come. She was already there, appearing out of thin air, and charging at the terrified elites, whom

now due to their shouts, seemed to believe they were fighting an incarnate of their god of mystery and deception. We were required to study the culture of the covenant and the way each race thinks and reacts. I thought I saw a blur and ducked just in time as the fist swung over my head. I countered with a swift kick in the stomach, which caused it to keel over, gripping its abdomen. I got up and realized they had shields, dodging the second elites attack from behind, I jumped off it's head and fired with my duel plasma rifles. It's shields were soon down. I landed, spun around and kicked it in the face, breaking its neck and forcing it down into the ground. The other elite had recovered from the blow, so I wedged my foot under it's allies' corpse and flung it into the air, knocking the living elite over. I then stepped on the two and fired a short burst into it's ugly face. _"Fifteen kills"_. I heard Stephanie's voice in my head "A little help?" I looked over; she was ducking behind a rock under heavy fire. I ran around to all the bodies and picked up their grenades. I then stuffed one of the bodies full of plasma grenades with a timed detonator and chucked it at a large group of them. One was killed just by the body It's self, It exploded and killed about a dozen of them. Drawing their attention off her, Stephanie took the opportunity to run up and start killing with her bare hands. I began shooting at them to make the process quicker, but I soon had my own problems. The elites had snuck upon me. I jumped down as they were about to fire and threw a screaming elite at them, knocking them to the ground. Stephanie used her remaining grenades to kill the rest up there. We'd reduced them from eighty-nine to forty seven in under half an hour. We ran over behind a rock on the right side as a few elites ran around the front of the base. We started firing as soon as we saw them; they were quickly reduced to twitching, purple sacks of flesh. We ran up the ramp and down through the roof entrance, we'd have better chances fighting close quarters. As we landed a few elites crowded around the roof entrance and bombarded us with plasma. Stephanie was at half shields and mine were gone. They started coming in through the front entrance. I ran over to the leader and slammed his face into the wall; I then ripped his helmet of and kicked him into the others. As he got to his feet I shoved the plasma rifle down his throat and he drowned in his own digestive fluids. I picked up his body and used it to beat another elite unconscious. Stephanie ran from behind me, rolled on the ground and kicked upwards mid roll, sending an elite into the ceiling. I picked up a body and used it as cover as I charged at the group, knocking a few over. I laughed as the remaining enemies ran in every direction, spewing out from the base.

I pulled my helmet off, "That was something," I said as Stephanie pulled off hers sitting in a corner. "ya" she said, pulling at the hair stuck to her face with sweat "quite a workout". I smiled at this, sensing something watching me, I fired at a nearby rock, the plasma bolt bounced of the elite's head as it ran off. The sky turned off and the elites made for the door, but were quickly gunned down by the two automated mini guns. Sheildless, they made for easy prey as they were slowly reduced to a pile of unrecognizable body parts.

End
file.